

Working Notes

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL
OPEN SPACE LAND ACQUISITION AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION
COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING OF MARCH 17, 2014**

Present: Chairman Frank Szeps, Councilor Meg Casasanta, Councilor Joe Kochanek and Wendell Coogan (Non-Voting, Ex-Officio Member). Also present was: Ray Carpentino (Economic Development Director)

Those absent: Sandra Kelly (Non-Voting, Ex-Officio Member).

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Frank Szeps called the Monday, March 17, 2014 meeting of the Open Space Land Acquisition and Farmland Preservation Council Subcommittee to order at 5:31 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Frank Szeps asked if anyone from the public wished to address this Subcommittee with regards to anything that was or wasn't on this evening's agenda for them to please come forward. No one from the public wished to.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES & WORKING NOTES

Councilor Meg Casasanta made a motion to approve the Minutes and Working Notes of the January 27, 2014 special meeting of the Open Space Land Acquisition & Farmland Preservation Subcommittee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

IV. DISCUSSION/ACTION

a. "Farm Friendly" action steps

Chairman Frank Szeps said he had been unsuccessful in getting a hold of the Chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission in order to coordinate the Open Space Land Acquisition & Farmland Preservation Subcommittee's action with the Plan of Conservation and Development so this will be kept as an action item for a future agenda item. He asked Ray Carpentino if he wanted to enlighten this Subcommittee on the "Farm Friendly" action steps. Ray Carpentino thought that they could combine this item and Item c. (Forum Speakers) together now. Chairman Frank Szeps said this was a good idea.

Ray Carpentino said this Subcommittee had discussions at its last meeting about what they could do to promote farming in Rocky Hill. One of the issues that they had learned at the AGvocate

Training Boot Camp was about Zoning Regulations and how to draft these or revise these in order to promote the concept of small farms (one, two or three acre), as well as farming in general. They had talked about having a speaker or two come in for another forum in the future. He said that perhaps this could be Phil Chester (the Town Planner in Lebanon), who had spoken at the boot camp. Phil Chester is very knowledgeable about Zoning Regulations and farming as to how many times they don't match up and how they can overcome that. Ray Carpentino said they also had heard from the Planning Director for the AGvocate Program, who had also spoken about "Farm Friendly" Regulations and implementing zoning, as well as how Towns could merge development with farming. Ray Carpentino also mentioned Elisabeth Moore, who will be invited in for a future meeting of this Subcommittee to speak on another topic. Ray Carpentino thinks that Elisabeth Moore will be helpful, knowledgeable and she will help them get the word across. Ray Carpentino said maybe they can have another farmland forum in May or June. Chairman Frank Szeps said Art (the farmer) was also very inspirational. Ray Carpentino asked if Art was from Ashford and Councilor Joe Kochanek thought he was. Chairman Frank Szeps told Ray Carpentino that they would direct him to arrange a date for this and he was thinking that this would be held independent of this Subcommittee's regular calendar of meetings. Ray Carpentino said he would take care of this. Chairman Frank Szeps thinks the timing might be a little delinquent when it comes to farming itself but he guesses that it is better late than never to get this rolling. He asked Ray Carpentino if they have any idea as to how many one acre, two acre and three acre farms there are in this Town. Ray Carpentino said no and he said this would probably be difficult to assess because these won't fall under the 290 exemption so these won't be listed anywhere.

Chairman Frank Szeps said he always has had in the back of his mind to get a program going that would encourage people who have backyard farms (whatever the size and these would be measured) to participate in a program where maybe this Subcommittee would go backyard to backyard to evaluate these to come up with some kind of recognition on an annual basis on all of the criteria that this Subcommittee can develop. The intent would be for these people to grow produce and bring it to a Farmer's Market that this Subcommittee could coordinate at a future date. This will have to happen quickly because he told everyone how short they know the growing season is in Connecticut. He told them if they are unsuccessful in rolling this out this year that if they can put it together at least because then they will have everything in place to do this next year.

Chairman Frank Szeps asked the other members of this Subcommittee if they would like to comment on this. Councilor Joe Kochanek told them if any of them have been reading the newspapers over the last couple of months that the big issue is that California, as well as that part of the country, is suffering from a severe drought. They have a severe flood now. Forty percent of their food comes from that area. Some is locally grown here and there is another percentage that comes from overseas. He referred to the climate change and he said they are becoming more and more dependent on a successful crop from the other side of the Country. He said that they should at least make everyone aware of the fact that food which is locally grown is probably more reliable and fresher. They should be doing as much as they can to provide this reliability down the road in case there are issues in other parts of the world so that they will be in some position to carry on at least.

Wendell Coogan wondered if the State would profit if this Subcommittee wrote a letter to the Department of Agriculture to ask the people who are on the Agricultural Committee in the legislature if they could do some things to help support or to subsidize young graduate agriculture majors or farming majors so that they can get off of the ground. There is an older farming community and many of the people who have been farming for years are at the point where they won't be able to continue farming. He wonders if they could get subsidies from the State. He said it would be a good thing to start moving the graduates in to start helping them and then to gradually have them taking the farms over so that there can be a continuing farm population, as well as an active growing one. Councilor Joe Kochanek asked Wendell Coogan if he meant this would be like an apprenticeship and he said yes.

Ray Carpentino believes that at the boot camp, Art (the farmer) had kids come in to do this very thing. Art sponsors youth farming. This concept is so that young people can see what farming is, what the technology is that is involved and to get things going. He is sure that Art can speak about this topic also if he comes in to speak.

Chairman Frank Szeps said that was a segue for him to give a DVD to Wendell Coogan so that he could view it completely and share his thoughts with this Subcommittee about it at a future meeting of theirs. Wendell Coogan said this would be his pleasure. Chairman Frank Szeps confirmed with Councilor Joe Kochanek that he already had a copy of this DVD and he said that he did. Chairman Frank Szeps asked Councilor Meg Casasanta if she wanted to take a look at this and she said sure.

Chairman Frank Szeps said for the benefit of the public who was watching this Subcommittee's meeting this evening that one of their major tasks as a Subcommittee is to purchase farmland development rights of the existing farms that they have identified in Rocky Hill. They are actively doing this and they would be going into Executive Session in the next couple of minutes for the purposes of negotiations and strategy to do exactly that. He said they have the "irons in the fire" and they would like to do exactly what had been mentioned this evening. If they can purchase the development rights of some of the large farms in Rocky Hill then the intention is to actively seek individuals to come to farm and grow produce that can be consumed in Rocky Hill, if not in some of the surrounding Towns. This is their goal. They are also concerned about open space and land acquisition but their primary focus right now is farmland preservation activity. This is due to the lack of open space.

b. POCD

Chairman Frank Szeps asked if anyone wanted to comment on the Plan of Conservation and Development. He is working with Planning and Zoning to see how they can be an active participant in getting this off of the ground and going forward. Councilor Joe Kochanek suggested that there be some expediency in getting things written down because there are seven acres that he knows of now in a place that people would never think of that are in front of the Planning and Zoning Commission now for a development of seven or eight houses. He referred to the land itself and he said that people don't even see it but when they get to it, it is good farmland. The developers are looking for every property that they can to push for new developments. He said the better off they are going to be, the quicker they move. He then

referred to the DVD that Chairman Frank Szeps referred to tonight and he said that maybe this can be put on the Town's T.V. station when Wendell Coogan is done looking at it so that it can be run periodically for a while for people to benefit in the same way that this Subcommittee is with regards to the information on it. Chairman Frank Szeps said for that thought to be held until they get responses back from Councilor Meg Casasanta and Wendell Coogan because the DVD is pretty lengthy. Councilor Joe Kochanek said they could do this in series. Chairman Frank Szeps said they might be able to do a little editing of it.

Councilor Meg Casasanta referred to the Plan of Conservation and Development and she said it is really important for this Subcommittee, as well as for Economic Development, to see that this moves forward quickly. She knows that they were granted an extension with regards to this because the State didn't complete their plan but she said it is time for them to get up-to-speed with this. Rocky Hill is changing and they need to maintain the farmland that they have. They need to get a plan together, from an Economic Development standpoint, where they see what is happening in Rocky Hill as they grow. She concurs that this process needs to be expedited as best as they can expedite it.

Chairman Frank Szeps said they had some documents on farmland zoning and he asked Ray Carpentino if this was something that he had sent. Ray Carpentino said he sent documents on easement. There had also been a slide that they had watched with regards to zoning. Chairman Frank Szeps said he apologized for not having that right now. Wendell Coogan asked Chairman Frank Szeps if that had come to him in an e-mail. Ray Carpentino said yes. He said that came to him and he thought he had sent it to everyone. Chairman Frank Szeps said the plan is that whenever they get information that there is an app (GoodReader) on their Council iPads where they can download it through. He explained some more and he said that they might be able to project this onto the television screen for their future meetings so the public can also see it.

c. Forum Speakers

This was already discussed this evening.

V. CORRESPONDENCE

Chairman Frank Szeps asked Ray Carpentino if there was any correspondence this evening. Ray Carpentino said there wasn't.

VI. EXECUTIVE SESSION: NEGOTIATION & STRATEGY: POTENTIAL LAND ACQUISITION WITH TOWN'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Councilor Meg Casasanta made a motion to go into Executive Session at 5:45 p.m. for the purpose of Negotiation & Strategy: Potential Land Acquisition with Town's Economic Development Director. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

Chairman Frank Szeps said the odds were that this Subcommittee wouldn't come out of Executive Session and take any public action so the Subcommittee meeting would be concluded at the conclusion of the Executive Session.

Councilor Meg Casasanta made a motion to come out of Executive Session at 5:59 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Meg Casasanta made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:00 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Booth
Recording Secretary